

**INTERVIEWER:** Candacy Taylor  
**INTERVIEWEE:** Lawrence Douglas Freeman (prefers to be called "Dougie")  
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**KEY:** CT – Candacy Taylor (Interviewer)  
DF – Dougie Freeman (Interviewee)

[Testing Audio levels]

CT: Can you tell me your favorite diner and what you like to eat?

DF: My favorite diner...I don't usually get to go to diners so I will tell you where I do eat in Provincetown. I am always busy so my life consists of take out food and chewing food and swallowing food between clients. It's always been take out, so I would say Angel Foods is a fabulous little deli that has a delicious curry chicken salad that I eat in half-pound increments on a regular basis. And if it's a fancy dinner with fancy clients, I like to go to Front Street, which has been here for years it's probably a four-star restaurant. It's dark and romantic. It's always delicious. It's a huge menu. It's a great experience.

CT: That's for special occasions.

DF: Yes, that's for special occasions. I have a partner, Jimmy who is a retired chef who cooks for me on a regular basis, like the sandwich that you saw him hand me. We've been together about thirty years. We're like an old married couple, so he does make me lunch.

CT: Ok, so we are here at the West End Salon in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Carol Burford is present along with Lawrence Dougie Freeman, and Candacy Taylor. I am the interviewer and it is August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and it is 12:38pm. Please state your full name, your profession and how long you've been doing hair.

DF: My name is Lawrence Douglas Freeman, I have been doing hair about forty years. I have been licensed about thirty-eight years. I'm a licensed cosmetologist in the state of Massachusetts, class level one.

CT: Where are you from?

DF: I'm from a suburb outside of Boston called Newton, Mass [Massachusetts] it's an upper-middle class scene, lately [it] looks more like Beverly Hills, however not all areas of Newton are fancy and I certainly was brought up in a blue-collar household.

CT: And where have you lived?

DF: I left home at a young age. I hitchhiked into Boston and I lived in Boston in several neighborhoods. Boston is a city that is made up of neighborhoods. I lived off of Newbury Street, I lived in Beacon Hill, I lived in Back Bay, I lived in Brighton, Allston and now Provincetown.

CT: Why did you choose to become a hairdresser?

DF: Well I left home at an early age because of disagreements with my parents about my lifestyle and I was very wild growing up and it was a tumultuous time in history. The late '60s, things are really heating up on all fronts, certainly women's lib, gay liberation, the question of equality right across the board, civil rights movement. It was a lot of political unrest, there was a lot going on. I would like to refer to it as a very rich time in our culture.

So that being said, this fight with my father, you know he broke my nose, I moved out of the house with \$15 in my pocket, I went and rented a room off of Newbury Street in Boston for \$15 a week, it was a shared bath situation, lots of cockroaches, etc...I got a job also working in a gay bar at that time, we'll call it a sleazy gay bar, it will remain nameless but it is no longer there.

So anyway [I was] seventeen years old working in a gay bar, the drinking age is twenty-one and I really wanted to be a rock star, I certainly had musical training, I had guitar lessons, violin lessons, clarinet lessons growing up. I felt as though I could sing on key and read music and I was ready for a career in rock music. However, none of this really materialized for me because I was trying to survive and feed myself and keep a roof over my head which really wasn't as hard as it may seem for me at that time. I had a nice lifestyle.

I had regular customers at the bar and there was an older gentleman, let's say he was twenty-seven and I was seventeen; ten years makes a big difference. We had stations or groups of tables that we were assigned every night. He would come in and sit at my station on a regular basis. He was older and not terribly attractive to me but he seemed to ask the right questions and it kind of

interested me on a different level so after weeks of badgering me I finally acquiesced to have a late-night dinner with him and it turns out he was the manufacturer of one of the largest shampoo companies in the United States. His feeling was maybe I should try a career in the beauty business, where I could look like a rock star but I didn't have to be a rock star. So I felt as though if I could look like a rock star, that that was almost good enough. So I was able to dress like a rock star and he got me my first job in a salon as a shampoo boy. And that's what I did for a few years, working in the bar, working during the day as a shampoo boy and then at night working in the clubs and then after a while I entered hairdressing school and took a few years to become licensed. However, I have to say that I did work in salons probably for four years with no license, it was always comical when the inspectors would come in and we would run out the back door or I would sit under the dryer and pretend I was a suburban woman getting her hair dried. Things have changed as far as licensure and inspections and so it's not as easy to do what I did now as it was then.

CT: Do you want to share who that person was, the shampoo manufacturer?

DF: I've been asked not to mention him by name. It's a very big company in the beauty business and I have mentioned him by name in previous interviews and have received notification to please not do so. Being that I was seventeen years old in a less than paternal relationship with a big person, so you know how that goes.

CT: Ok, that's fine. I completely understand. What is the best part of the job for you?

DF: The best part of the job for me right now is doing what I'm doing right now, doing interviews, taking the bows, being able to mentor people, being able to see what years of hard work has done and trying to remain humble. It's hard for me to be humble. But I'm a person with a lot of accomplishments and certainly unsinkable in some people's eyes.

CT: Can you talk about some of your accomplishments?

DF: I had the pleasure of doing work with Halston, Giorgio Sant'Angelo, Paul Mitchell the man, I've had a lot of celebrity clients over the years. Farrah Fawcett, Debbie Harry, Olympia Dukakis, Eartha Kitt, Jimmy James, lots of celebrities over the years. Certainly it's always fun to get an autograph and a picture and frame it and put it on the wall. Also won a lot of awards locally in different categories, not always gold, but silver and bronze too.

I have to say though that probably my most rewarding thing in my career was not working on a celebrity, or a beautiful woman or a beautiful man, really if anyone did their hair they would still be beautiful. I met a woman once who was a big psychiatrist in Cambridge. She was very wealthy. Before I met her I remember seeing the papers and what struck me was the blood all over the white walls, this is a woman who was a big psychiatrist and two guys broke into her house and they raped her and they kicked her between the legs and broke her pelvic bone. They jumped on her head and flattened her skull. This woman survived. When I met this woman she had a lot of facial hair and gray hair and I saw something underneath all that. I helped this woman reconstruct her life. I removed her facial hair, I gave her eyebrows. I put make-up on her. I made her a blonde. Bringing that woman back to life was more gratifying than doing any Hollywood star that I've ever done. Beauty has many facets, and fashion, even though in some ways is temporary, volatile and empty, [it] is monumental on the other hand.

So back to that woman, that to me comes to the forefront as probably one of my most rewarding experiences, more than being on television over 180 hours this year, which I have been. I have the honor of being under contract with NBC and Bravo and having a hit show and all that. And I certainly love that but in my memory if you ask me what was the most rewarding it was working with the psychiatrist because it took a lot of my artistic ability, my professional ability and being the person that I am and having had a similar experience to her, however not as dramatic, was able to help this person re-enter society.

During high school I taught arts and crafts as an independent study at the Walter E. Fernald School in Waltham, which is a state mental facility. At the time I was there I believe I had 400 clients. I also taught at HRI, the same units of arts and crafts, which is located in Brookline, Mass, which is for suicidal teens. At the same time, I also taught at the Mason-Rice School in Newton Center under Ms. Sawyer and I taught the same unit there. This unit was an arts and crafts unit and I called it, "What is beauty?" For me to understand beauty in twelfth grade, I wanted to understand ugliness or un-beautiful so that's why I went to Fernald's school to work with people who's heads were... some as big as my fist and some of them as big as watermelons. When you see someone who is extremely deformed or as you would say, "really ugly," in our business or in our society, our first reaction is to recoil. What I learned is these people have many beautiful things about them, it may be their eyes, it may be the way they hold their hands, it may be the way they look when they are working on artwork. It made me ask myself a lot of questions through these experiences. I feel as though at the time I did this, it had a dramatic effect on

me.

I just want to reiterate that, a beautiful person, no matter who does their hair they're still a beautiful person. A person who is overweight, not so pretty, they're the people that really benefit from the beauty business because in our trickery we create beauty and we create self-confidence. It goes from the outside in. Beauty is only skin deep but you can either start at the skin and move inward or you can start at the heart and move outward. This is what I try to do. This is what I've done for rich, poor, royalty, sinners, saints, mafia, criminals, billionaires, throw-a-ways, run-a-ways...I treat everybody the same men, women you name it. It's easier. That's why I never had trouble with the Civil Rights Movement. It's easy to treat everyone the same, you just pay everyone the same, treat everyone the same. That's it. I will hold a door for a woman, I will offer my seat because I come from the generation of gallantry and deferring to a woman always, but that's a generational thing. I don't really see that in the young men of today.

CT: That's a beautiful statement and I appreciate that. Can you talk a little about the difference between doing somebody's hair, like an icon of the American female, Farrah Fawcett versus really beautifying somebody who society doesn't consider beautiful?

DF: What the difference is?

CT: Yeah, for you.

DF: For me, when you do a celebrity, these days, we Google them, we study their look, we study their hairdresser, we go into it knowing their background, their hairstyle, their history, things that they're known for. Like all of us have a history that's available online, even what our house is worth, what we made last year, all of this is available. To someone who is poor or a street person, in most cases this is not available. So you're really shooting from the hip more with the person who is not the celebrity. So the difference is different history, different approach. The street person or the non-celebrity, I'm able to be more spontaneous. People who are celebrities or in the fashion business have a certain look, a signature style or even a lot of times these celebrities seek me out because I help create signature styles. I always say, "I can help you use what you've got to get what you want." But I apply this to the street person or to the sixty-eight year old waitress or to who ever. I have to categorize people but you know we have to do it in our business. You know just as you're a blonde a redhead or a brunette. You know you're either rich, middle-class or poor or working poor...you know all of this helps me understand the person. It's all

about understanding and I would say the most important thing in any relationship is communication. And I am a man who has learned to listen. What I have learned growing up is that a lot of men, and I'm a man so I'm going to say this, really have trouble listening and especially listening to women. So what I really do, is I try to communicate with the client. And I have to reiterate again and say in any relationship, any relationship, any communication is the most important thing. In communication, you have to have dialogue and you have to have exchange and I'm not talking about monologues, I'm talking about back and forth. So as I man, I feel as though I have learned to listen.

CT: What would you say is the most difficult part of the job?

DF: For me, the most difficult part of the job...I'm an owner of a salon half the week and half the week I'm an employee of the salon, so when I'm here in my salon in Provincetown as an owner, what's difficult is all the facets that go into this beauty salon or to a beauty salon, just like a diamond, so many facets, so many things to go wrong, so many things that have to be checked. In a lot of ways it's like a medical practice. I am a hands-on person. I am in the salon as much as sixteen hours a day. I overlook everything and oversee everything from cleanliness to scheduling to education, to licensure to you name it, to the color of the shingles to meeting deadlines. The business part of the business is always challenging. I can't say that it's my least favorite and I want to just segue a little to say that I had a cancer scare this year so I really did a lot of soul searching during that period. After thinking I was going to die of cancer, I have to say, where I'm sitting here now with you, even the challenges are good, even the problems are good, even taking out the trash on Wednesday night which takes me about a half an hour to do wrapping up the trash in garbage bags, it's even good. Am I going to complain to you about anything? I'm not going to complain. My days of complaining are over. Because you can't really go there unless you've been there and I'm lucky that I don't have cancer and I'm lucky for the awareness that I got from this experience.

CT: Wow, that's great. What hair color do you use most often?

DF: For covering gray, I like to use Midway, it's a low impact, non-ammonia color that is not damaging, will cover gray and does not have a lot of strong components, that's what I like to do to cover gray it's made by Wella and it is a healthy-ish hair color, probably the most healthy would be henna or a direct plant derivative, chamomile or henna. I also use those and they are completely safe. I have to say that I'm conscious of what's safe and not because I work in Harvard Square with a high-brow community two to three days a week and

these are women that know about the components that go into hair color and shampoo and conditioner and etcetera. A lot of them have extensive backgrounds in chemistry and they know the statistics and they know more than your average consumer. This has educated me so I want to use the safest product possible that I can use on my clients so I do my research and also I'm at the New York show every year for three to four days, which is our industry's most important show which happens every year usually in April for three or four days at the Jacob Javitz Center. I am there every day from beginning to end.

CT: What is that show called?

DF: It's the International Beauty Show. And this is where things that have just cleared the FDA and are put on the market so I am always looking to do things in the safest way.

CT: Can you tell me about more toxic products used in the industry that should be regulated and aren't?

DF: To me if it's FDA approved and it's used in the salons, I can't really point fingers at any specific product. There are certainly warnings and scares that are on the backs of bottles and things like this, there are people that are allergic to hair color to relaxers to even henna and even to natural products. Some of the most deadly poisons in the world are natural poisons, so as far as a reaction I always like to do a skin test in the beginning of my relationship with a client so that way I will pretty much know if they are allergic or not and I take an extensive history of the clients chemical usage so I have a good idea and I always use a barrier cream around the face. This prevents the skin from getting stained so you don't have to scrub it off also it prevents any color from dripping down into the face.

CT: There's a lot of controversy about the formaldehyde in the Keratin or Brazilian blowout treatment. Can you talk about that at all?

DF: Certainly. I'm happy to talk about that. The product that I use does not have formaldehyde in it. I've been using it for six years. But I do have a story that I heard and I will repeat it. Is it true? I don't know. I heard that the way that this was discovered was in Brazil there was a woman with very curly hair that was working for an undertaker they dropped the body in embalming fluid which contains formaldehyde, spilled off the shelf and spilled over half of her hair. She was immediately rushed into the shower and when she came out of the shower, the side of her hair that had the embalming fluid on it was

completely straight. I believe this is how this whole procedure was born. I may be wrong, but it's a story I heard and it could be folklore but it sounds like something that probably is true. So I'm sure that some businessman started packaging the formaldehyde and suspended it in some sort of creamy base and this was how the whole Brazilian treatment started. I know when it came to the USA, formaldehyde couldn't be used and the derivatives, one of them called "anal-hyde" or any of the "hydes" are used to replace it.

CT: And they are formaldehyde free?

DF: They are formaldehyde free, there have been companies that have used a formaldehyde product and they have been fined by the FDA and in some continents have been banned. The product I use, I've been using for six years, is safe and has no formaldehyde and I get great results with it. I have to add that the whole straight look is all over the world. I call it the "anglocizing" of society. I make all my money straightening hair and bleaching hair and anglocizing people. The first question I ask people with curly hair is, "Do you embrace your curly hair?" And then we go from there. People who don't embrace their curly hair, they have options.

CT: What percentage say they don't embrace...?

DF: Lately I would say it's like 50/50. I have to say, it's the same thing with the tanning. I tan, I spray tan myself, to look more tan and healthier, better and all that because I like a tan look. The other thing is do you want a darker look or do you want a lighter look? Half the world wants lighter skin and there are products that are designed for lightening and brightening. In fact the trend now in skin care, if you're not into tanning is "enlightenment" and brightening, same thing with hair. If you want curly then we have so many products now. I carry three different lines that are specifically designed for curly hair. If you embrace your curly hair there are products for that and a whole plethora of things you can do and if you want straight hair same thing. So as far as the client is concerned you have options. You can control the way you look and I believe that our hair is our most important accessory and I think that it can certainly make or break you.

CT: Yeah, I agree. About the straightening, do you even use a lye relaxer anymore?

DF: I don't use a lye relaxer. I haven't used one since the '70s probably. When I learned how to do African American hair was in Harlem in the '70s. It was a whole different way of doing hair.



CT: Why were you in Harlem in the '70s?

DF: I was at the New York show and there was a workshop that was held in a salon in Harlem and I can't remember the name of it. But the company was French Perm and it was a lye product. We would have to put a protective base on the scalp before we did it and we would have to base around the face. I still use base occasionally but I would have to say I never use a lye product. I use all non-lye now. I use the same relaxer that Oprah uses, which is a non-lye.

CT: You know she's going natural?

DF: Yeah.

CT: Can you talk about any issues you might have teaching somebody how to deal with different hair textures? I think on your pre-questionnaire, you said five percent were African American.

DF: Yeah.

CT: So even though you don't see a call for dealing with black hair texture or kinky hair texture, when you're overseeing your staff do you make sure that when they come in that they know how to deal with different textures? Or do you teach them as needed?

DF: The scene at the salon is a lot like a medical practice with accomplished doctors. These are accomplished hairdressers that have a lot of experience. I pretty much don't get anyone out of school that is going to be working on a client. My staff has experience to do all hair types. We get people from all over the world because Provincetown is a resort and the resort-scene salon here is different from working in a suburb or working in the city. A boutique resort salon, which is what we have at West End Salon and Spa, we're getting tourists, were getting people that we'll never see again and we're getting people that are from all parts of the world. So to answer your question, no employee of mine will ever work on anyone where they don't know what they're doing. That's why it's important to hire the right person with their expertise.

I have to say that the client is getting curlier and curlier as the years have gone on because it's all about mother Africa and it's all about intermarriage. Curly hair is getting more into beauty culture, which is just an observation. Certainly in the Boston area you see a lot of blondes just because of the people that immigrated here in New York you see less blondes, you see more brunettes. I

don't really know but where I sit in the business having been doing this for forty years, I have to say that I'm seeing more curl in the clients' hair.

CT: That's good because I've walked into high-end salons in San Francisco and be completely clueless about my hair type and the last time I walked into a salon like that I ended up having to cut most of it off because they practically ruined my hair. So it's good to know that there's a call for education.

DF: Definitely. I always say mother Africa, but it's definitely the client and certainly inter-marriage or the gene pool, I'm seeing more curly hair so we're seeing more in the business even though we're not seeing that much here. And even in the city, in Harvard Square, I'm not seeing that much. I still find that African American clients seem to gravitate toward African American salons or if you have an African American hairdresser you're going to see people coming in. It's just sort of the way it is.

CT: Do you prefer the term "hair stylist, hairdresser?" Do you care? Some people do. I'm just wondering what you feel about that if anything.

DF: Oh, I would say call me anything but late for dinner....just call me.

CT: Do you know where that stigma may have come from, in terms of the beauty school drop out stigma?

DF: Let's go back to years ago, where if you were a hairdresser you couldn't join a country club, if you were a hairdresser you couldn't rent, you couldn't live in some apartment buildings, especially if you were a gay hairdresser or if you were flamboyant. Was there discrimination? Yes. Was there discrimination against me? Yes. Is hairdressing a second-class profession you can make money at? Maybe. I wouldn't call it second-class now. Forty years ago, we accepted, we were in service, we were in a visceral service, we were working on dirty hair, with dirty smells and greasy. This is the profession. We accepted it. I accepted it. I accepted that I was in service and I accepted that I was turned down for certain apartments in Boston. I was turned down in certain neighborhoods, either because I was gay, or because I was a hairdresser. Things have changed certainly. I would say that hairdressing, hair styling, being in the beauty business, being a salon owner, even being a shampoo boy does not have the negative connotation that it used to have.

In many parts of the country, men did not go into the hairdressing business. I've been the first male hairdresser many clients have had, especially when they've come to Harvard from the Midwest or from the South and I'm always

shocked at them saying to me, “You know you’re the first guy that ever did my hair.” This is a business that has mostly women in it. I would venture to say probably Vidal Sassoon’s top moneymakers were women. Do we know their names? Probably not so much. But we know his name. Like the world we live in the men push their way to the front. They carve their names there where everyone can see. I have to say more female stylists are getting more recognition and it shouldn’t be a sexual thing. It should all be the same, it should all be equal but to go back there yes certainly, “a second-class profession that you can make money at,” I think that’s what they told me.

CT: Yeah, I was talking to Mary Ellen [Dougie’s friend] today about Madame C.J. Walker and how she became the first female millionaire, black or white in the United States because she was dealing with Black hair and it was a need that hadn’t been filled yet for Black women so it was really financially rewarding for her. Would you say that some people assume that being a hairstylist is not financially rewarding but we know that’s not necessarily true. There are some people who can make a lot of money, there are some people who still work really hard and don’t make money. It’s all over the map. Would you say that’s true?

DF: It’s hard to generalize. I have to say one thing: if you work hard, you will never fail. That’s what I have to say, that’s my answer really. It depends on the level, it depends on your level of skill, it’s a visceral business, it’s a communication business, it’s a love business, it’s a touching business. There are so many factors that go into it.

I think that a lot of young students are not really aware of how difficult it’s going to be or how many skills they have to memorize. For instance, every haircut that I do has as many as seventy-five steps to it, being step one, step two, step three and so on. When I teach these haircuts. I teach them in steps. The student must memorize these steps. Not everyone can memorize seventy-five steps. This is why it’s easy for me to replicate the haircut when they come in the next month because I know what I did, because I use certain indicators on the face to draw lines, to take my lines from. In my consultation, which I do every time, without fail, whether I’ve done your hair twice or 200 times. We sit in the chair, we look in the mirror and I say, “What are we going to do today?” At that point I listen to the client and I start gathering information in my little mind and what I do is design a haircut that’s going to be flattering for her within the guidelines that she’s giving me. This is blueprint. Just like I would design a house, if she was asking me to build a house for her. What color would you like the house? What shape? How many porches? These are just the same types of things an architect does. It’s a client-based business. So in a nutshell, I

do a consultation, I design a haircut, which is the shape of the house and then I say, "What color?" You have to build the house, before you paint the house. It's the same thing with hair. I want to talk about the haircut first, get that settled, design the blueprint in my mind and then go on to the color.

All of these facets of this experience have many components and those components have changed over the years. Because years ago we would go through Vogue Magazine or hairdressing books, etc...Now we can pick up an iPad or a smart phone and bring up whatever haircut from whatever movie or who's in pop culture. So as far as the hairdresser we have so many tools of communication to use. Even a lot of times we print them out and stick them on the mirror so that we can see. We also have an App that we use which puts your face on different hairstyles. I believe this is called a Mary Kay App. That way you can see exactly how you're going to look before we even begin, or at least you have great idea. These Apps I believe are a dollar or two dollars, more hairdressers should use them. Also, you have a laptop at the desk or who doesn't have a smart phone in their pocket? Communication, as I said, is the most important thing in any relationship and it's the first hurdle that you must jump over with that client, trust me!

CT: I wanted to talk about the physical labor of the job. I've heard stories about arthritis and I know you don't want to complain today but I'm just wondering about the reality of the physical labor of this job.

DF: The physical labor...I would say that when you own your own salon, or you own your own business you certainly work harder. If you think for one minute when you open up that dream salon and you have that wonderful shining expression of your way of doing things that's going to make you famous, you have that terrific high of opening the salon that you've dreamed of and all that...if you think for one minute that it's not going to be hard work, you got another thing coming. If you're a hairdresser that worked ten hours a day and you make a lot of money and you got a lot of clients and you want to open your own salon, get ready to work twenty-four hours a day at least in the beginning. There are people that are able to sit in a lawn chair and drink Pina Coladas and make millions every year in this business, I don't know too many of them. I am not one of them. Like any business, if you own it you're going to work harder, you're going to give it your all because you want to really do that. It hedges the bet of failure. No one wants to fail and I really feel in my case that I've always worked hard because I was so afraid of failure and I really don't do failure.

I certainly work a lot of hours and in some ways I would say that my body is deformed from the work that I do. But I've been doing it for years and I'm

comfortable to be backstage and I'm not on the catwalk myself anymore at sixty [years old] and I'm happy with...or I'll say I'm accepting of how I look, there's always room for improvement.

CT: You don't look sixty, that's for sure.

DF: So, in my case: long hours, grueling work, certainly emotionally draining at times, but the flip side is the pure joy of helping people; the pure joy of bringing to an insecure person, security; the pure joy of seeing your name in lights; the pure joy of seeing yourself on television 180 times in one year; the pure joy of being recognized by strangers in any city in three continents; the pure joy of being able to buy real estate; the pure joy of the respect of your colleagues, I'm not going to say pure joy again but certainly a lot of satisfaction.

CT: What did Tabatha teach you? [Tabatha Coffey hosts the television show that Freeman appeared on, "Tabatha Takes Over."]

DF: Tabatha taught me a lot. Tabatha held up a mirror in front of me and said, "Look at you. This experience with us is not going to be what's great about Dougie, because there certainly are great things about Dougie, this experience is going to be about what's wrong with Dougie. How can we make you better?" A diamond is a diamond when you dig it up out of the dirt it's the polishing, the setting, the salesmanship that goes after it. I'm not saying that I am a diamond that she dug up out of the dirt, but I'm going to say that I felt like one [chuckle]. My experience with her, was life-changing, she's someone I respected for years, I studied her, I like her showmanship, I like her resilience, I like her strength, I think in some ways her and I share a similar background, although I don't know that for a fact. I have read her book. It's a great insight into her life. I spent eighty hours with her. Eighty hours of filming, eighty hours of questions, eighty hours of learning, eighty hours of being tested, eighty hours of no air-conditioning, not a lot of food, no music. It kind of brought me back to a very uncomplicated and raw state. I certainly was vulnerable I was ready to be vulnerable. I was ready to be stripped naked in front of ten million people. But as ready as we make ourselves for these experiences, I hadn't experienced this before so as ready as I thought I was, I wasn't always ready. I think she liked me and it goes a lot better with Tabatha if she likes you. I was certainly open to her and open to learn as much as I could and take as much as I could from the experience. I gave it my all, so did the staff. I believe it paid off for us.

CT: What do you think it did for you?

DF: I think it branded me. I think it really made our brand, stick. There are

certainly people that wouldn't set foot in my salon after they saw that show and there are a lot of people that beat feet there when they are on the cape they drive three hours just so they can meet me and hug me and love me. I don't know what I did, but for some reason I have this thing, a lot of women of my age like me. I don't know how I came off on TV but maybe I'm telegenic or whatever it was, but I think I really connected with my viewers. All I did was just shoot from the hip and I was who I am, that's all. At the end of the day, that's who we all are, is who we are, really. It's reality TV. It's real.

CT: Well it's obvious that you were genuine and that you had a big heart. That's what came through when I watched the show. What was your connection to NBC?

DF: NBC is the parent company of Bravo, they also have Sci-Fi [channel] and others they're a big conglomerate.

CT: Do you have anything else to say about Tabatha?

DF: Well, I think Tabatha should buy a summerhouse here in P-town [Provincetown], she's certainly an icon, and certainly in the gay culture, [she's] an icon. I'm thrilled that she came out as a gay woman. I think that all of us gay people should be open about it if we can, it's always a sacrifice, whether you're in show business or whether you're digging ditches. As gay people we can walk down the street and you may not see us, unlike being African American or someone of color, or Asian. People look at those people and they know they're a member of a minority, whereas being gay, it's a minority that we can step in and out of. I know that there are other ethnic groups too where people through their hair or make-up can step in and out of being part of a minority or not. It depends on how you sleep at night. I always took the abuse and I always made sure that I was out of the closet and I was sort of proud of who I was because I was different. I know that it may have cost me financially over the years, but I have peace of mind. And when I am in a nightclub or a gay bar and someone comes up to me and says "Please don't tell anyone you saw me here." I say right away, "Don't be afraid. I'll keep your secret. But please understand that I was thrown out of my house for being gay. I was homeless. I ate pizza crusts off the side of the street. They had sand in it. I can even recall the sand in my teeth from eating gutter food. I sacrificed a lot to be gay. I stood up to my parents. I stood up to society. Understand that by me keeping your secret [long pause], and I will keep your secret, that I want you to understand what I went through so that maybe someday you won't have to keep that secret. And even in the work I've done in television or the work I've done with people that I've met, being openly gay is not something to be ashamed of, like being African

American is not something to be ashamed of, like being religious is not something to be ashamed of, in my eyes. But it's me that's speaking. But yes, I'll keep your secret for you and I pray to God that we won't have to keep these secrets much more.

CT: That was very moving. Are you married, legally?

DF: I'm not legally married. I did have a commitment service on the beach during the TV show, I was told that we were going to go skinny dipping and I was getting ready for that and I thought "Oh God, I've got to be naked in front of 10 million people." I think, after I do this, I've done everything else in life, so I'll do this. And then we went down to the beach and there was Jimmy and my staff was sitting there and there were flowers, it was beautiful. I have to say I was very relieved that I didn't have to go skinny-dipping. Tabatha thought it was about time that I got married to Jimmy and that we had this commitment service so we did. This is not a legal marriage, for many reasons we can't be legally married.

CT: It's not legal with Massachusetts?

DF: This was all settled with NBC. My partner is disabled and gets benefits from government programs that he would not be able to participate in if we were legally married. There are a lot of people in my position. There is no way that I could afford to support him 100%. So are we committed? Yes. Are we legally married? No.

CT: And how long have you been together?

DF: We've been together about thirty years.

CT: That's great. So what are some of the most old-fashioned hair techniques that you do?

DF: Oh, some of the most old-fashioned? Certainly the curling iron has been around for years. Years ago we would heat it in a gas flame. Even in some salons still they are using the gas. Curling irons have been used to curl hair probably since the Civil War. We still use curling irons, we use flattening irons, they've been around for years they are old-style. We certainly set hair with rollers and tease hair. We do it on 80-year olds and we do it on 17-year olds. There are certain things in this business that are as old as time and there are certain things that are new. The technology is always improving. Yes the curling iron that I use today is better than the one that I used in the '60s.

Shampoos are vegetable-derived now and naturally derived as opposed to detergent-derived. Things are healthier. Looks, hairstyles, fashion is less formal, unless it haute couture or unless it's runway or unless it's for a fashion show or a fantasy photo shoot. But pretty much people don't come every week to have their hair styled. It's more....come for the cut, come for the shape, come for the color, maintain it at home with the products and with their own two hands.

I notice that little girls that I see all seem to know their way around a curling iron and a blow dryer and a brush pretty well. This is always interesting to me. There's so much education. You can go on YouTube and you can learn how to cut your own hair and put feathers in your own hair and highlight your own hair. All of this is on YouTube and I will admit that I go on YouTube and I want to see and I still learn from YouTube. I like to spend two to three hours a week looking at YouTube videos and some of the things I learn are from thirteen-year old girls that live in Queens. And some things I learn are from people that are on the other side of the ocean. There's so much education available, right at your fingertips. And who doesn't have access to a computer? I'm sure that there are people that don't but certainly libraries [have them]. There's so much available to you right at your fingertips.

CT: How has your salon been involved in the community, if at all?

DF: How are we involved in the community? We do a lot of locals. I do a lot of free hair cutting for people that can't afford it. We run house accounts and charges for people that want to charge it. We do a lot of fundraising activities. We participate in the different auctions. Our local charities are helping our women and AIDS support group. We always give products and services to their auctions. We take care of people in a very quiet way. This is a small town. This is a town with about 3,000 people in it. This is a town with billionaires and people who are living below the poverty level. This is a town where a young girl from a very dirt poor family can end up getting her college education paid anonymously by one of our billionaires. I've seen it many times. What I find about people that do nice things like that is that they don't always want people to know who they are. But this is a town where you have these rich guys and girls that watch this little girl grow up, they know about her family and they follow her from afar. And maybe she can get a scholarship and maybe she can't and if she doesn't then sometimes out of the blue comes a check, and this happens a lot. This is a town that takes care of its own. This is a town where no one goes hungry. One of the top designers in the world writes a check every year and supports our soup kitchen. He walked in, no one even knew who he was he sat down, he ate lunch with the rest of them, with the great unwashed, the biggest designer in the world. He asked the woman at the desk who took



the tickets, the donations, “What’s your operating budget here?” I believe...and this is a story so it might not be factual, she gave him a copy of the annual report, he took out his checkbook and wrote a check for that amount. Her mouth remained open for a few minutes. It was just another day in Provincetown.

CT: That’s amazing. I think it’s special, the role that salons play in different communities.

DF: I had a client that I see regularly. I’ve seen her for years. She had kind of fine hair. I noticed a black mole on her head. I mentioned it to her. She came back again next month for a haircut. I noticed the mole had gotten bigger. I said, “I really think that you have to have this looked at.” She was the type that smokes three packs a day and didn’t really care about herself that much and didn’t really care about her mortality. As a professional, I have to care. Even if she wanted to commit suicide it’s illegal to commit suicide. And I think the reason is, is because society needs you, even if you don’t think society needs you, because we’re all together in this world and we need people to make up society. So, long story short, I called her mother and told her mother and we got help for her. She got seen by a doctor. The next time I saw her about one quarter of her skull was missing. She had a type of melanoma that had gone into the bone in her head. I saved this woman’s life. It wasn’t easy. I’ll always remember this scene of Patty Duke in *The Miracle Worker* with Anne Bancroft. That movie motivated me a lot. I feel like that a lot of times. I feel like Annie Sullivan a lot of times. You try to help people and I do help them and sometimes they’ll turn around and spit scrambled eggs in your face but you know what, I know what the right thing is and I’m going to save a life if I can. And in that case, I did. The client is a loyal client. She eventually did pass away, but not from cancer.

I have another client, and old woman. She’s a famous window designer in New York for Bloomingdales, a very chic woman. I used to dye her hair bright red. I used to notice bruising on her. She had the shingles for months. I used to go to her house and wash her hair. She was very embarrassed to show her bare breast to me. She was probably seventy at the time. I told her I was like a doctor and I loved her and that I didn’t care how she looked. It didn’t make any difference. She was still embarrassed. The shingles hurt her so badly she couldn’t stand the pain of a cotton shirt on. She couldn’t stand anything. She was in agony for months. I noticed black and blue again. I witnessed her husband being verbally abusive to her and physically abusive. I called Elder Services. I reported it. I never saw her again.

As a hairdresser, we are a segue, we are a gateway to other services. If a client gets really heavy with me and I think they have illness, mental illness, or physical illness or if something's wrong and I can help I don't try to solve their problems, I try to refer them if I can. If it's a matter of skin cancer or a matter of life and death, I really go to the mat. You're going to lose the client anyway. You're either going to lose the client because the husband's going to kill them, or cancer's going to kill them, since you're going to lose the client anyway, you might as well save their life. Sometimes you go through these things and they do stay with you but my point being that you have to do the right thing. I know the difference between right and wrong, that's what I try to impart to people. I try to impart that in the mentoring that I do. It's difficult because in our society we don't have fathers anymore, we don't have the two-parent family. We don't always have the good role models, we don't have religion, we don't have the work ethic, so it's difficult for me to do the mentoring because these are components that are so important in the child and I'm not saying that you can't be a fabulous single mother but I'm saying if you're a single mother and you're working like crazy to put food on the table, you don't really have time for manners and discipline and you want Junior to be a friend, you don't want Junior to say, "I hate you." Unlike in my case, when I used to stamp my foot at my mother and say, "I hate you." She used to look up from her cigarette and say, "I really don't care how you feel about me Dougie. I have my quota of friends." And she would go back to smoking. I was four years old, I didn't know what quota meant, but I knew that I could not control my mother.

CT: Did you ever have a relationship with your parents?

DF: Yes, certainly. Growing up, my mother was an Avon lady, she was in the make-up and beauty business, my father was in a partnership with his brother, and they had a very bad relationship. I grew up in a violent household. There was strong discipline and alcoholism. It was common, certainly a common background to a lot of people, I'm not going to say it was special. What's special is what I did with that experience, when I left that place. I left home at an early age, I was able to support myself, educate myself. At twenty-nine years old, I went back to live with them. Because I knew that I could not afford to pay the rent on an apartment and open my business. So I went back to them and I lived under their roof, by their rules and they mellowed with age. I was with my father when he was dying. He said to me, "Can you find it in your heart to forgive me? I know I wasn't father of the year." I said to him, "You know, I love you, and I know you did the best you could and I forgive you." My mother is ninety-six, I do her hair every week. She is certainly a narcissist, as far as labels go. I only have one mother so I don't know how touchy-feely other mothers are because in my life, it was all about my mother and it still is and that may be why

she is ninety-six and that may be is why her son, me, goes and does her hair every single week. I do it because I do love her and I still do. I like her personality. I like her monologues. I learned a lot from my mother. I can criticize her, but everyone can criticize their parents and I think there's nothing special about that. I think that I'm probably as common as apple pie. So I will say that yes, I am a product of a violent, alcoholic family, but I am a survivor and I am happy in the life that I have now. I'm happy in my relationship with my mother and I work at my relationship with my siblings. I find that as we get older, you have to put work into things, and relationships and I certainly work at my relationships with my siblings.

CT: What do they do?

DF: My sisters are both nurses. They are both retired. My oldest sister is from my mother's first marriage. She lives in Colorado. She now has MS [Multiple Sclerosis] and is in a wheelchair. My younger sister is a retired nurse who lives in Gloucester Mass [Massachusetts], who has been retired since she was fifty.

CT: Going back briefly to the domestic violence situation with your client, are you familiar with the program, "Cut it Out?"

DF: "Cut it Out," I've heard of it, but this happened years ago.

CT: And I don't even know if "Cut it Out" is still operating.

DF: I called an elder abuse hotline.

CT: I wonder if there are other active organizations. I know that there are some in the south that will go to different Black neighborhoods and try and train hairstylists to watch for signs of diabetes and other health-related issues and then there was "Cut it Out" which was a program that trained stylists to look for signs to see whether a woman was being beaten and what to do when you see that. So I was wondering if you had any experience with any kind of organizations like that but it sounds like you just took the initiative.

DF: It is my understanding that if I do not stop a potentially life-threatening situation that I am guilty of that situation. It is my understanding that as a hairdresser if I see anything physically wrong with that client that I have to tell them about it. The difficulty comes in that, our business is a feel-good business. You may come to the salon to feel good, to escape your problems, to escape your abusive husband, to escape the poverty at home, to escape those kids with the full diapers, to escape whatever. It's an escape, and just like other escapes

like drugs, alcohol, shopping, gambling, whatever...we fit into that in some way. A lot of people come to the salon to escape. The woman that reads while doing your hair does not want to be talked to, the woman that closes her eyes does not want to be talked to. In a life-threatening situation, it's not about what they want. It's about you saving their life. As far as small talk and all of that, you really take the woman or the client's lead, a woman will always tell you what she wants, you just have to listen, essentially. But my point being that in a feel-good business, it's certainly easier to ignore that black and blue, it's easier to take that excuse, it's easier to ignore that black mole. It's easier. But what's not easy is if you get called on it and it comes back that you knew it and that you are part of that death because of your neglect, because of your selfishness, because of your laziness. This is something that I think that we need more of in the beauty business as far as training and schools I believe that the curriculum in the schools doesn't even touch on anything psychological someone should design a whole unit for beauty schools that touches on all these psyche issues, socio issues, abuse, health issues, you know there's so much. There are so many holes in our education still but there always has been.

CT: You do a lot more than just do hair.

DF: Or you can just do hair. I have friends that make \$300,000 a year and charge \$200 a haircut and they don't talk to their clients and they literally just do hair. And they have a lot of clients. A lot more clients than I do because not everyone wants to talk about the first time you saw your mother naked. There are certainly times I don't want to talk about that. There are times I want to get a haircut, I don't want a psychoanalysis, I want my hair cut. "What are we going to do today?" "I want to cut my hair." "What are we going to do today?" "I want to put blonde streaks in my hair." I don't want to relive my childhood. I want an escape sometimes.

CT: How much do you share with your clients?

DF: It's all about them. I have a huge ego. I have a story to tell, I have a book to write, I have a movie to sell, okay, that being said, I am not the star in my salon. The client is the star. It's all about them. If they want to know about me, they can ask me, I will tell them. I tell them carefully. I tell them some edited versions, but I will always tell the client the truth. What I've noticed with people like me who grow up in abusive backgrounds, it's like being a member of a club. In a way it's like being a member of the Mason's or some other paternal organization. I think that we can always recognize each other. It used to be something that we were ashamed of, something we hung our heads down about but I think we have to look at that differently. I'm talking about people

who have been in abusive situations, people that are victims of violence. We're all in the same club. We can recognize each other. We paid a high price to be in this club. And I think it's an exclusive club in some ways because it's a club that gives us empathy, resilience, the ability to maybe function out of our body. Those are the good things, I think. I'm not going to say that there's anything good about abuse, because there isn't. There's nothing good about cruelty, nothing. With any sadness comes joy. There's no such thing as a straight line, everything is going to come around again. Everything will change. No matter how bad the day is, the day will come and the day will go and I think things are always better in the morning. I'm a survivor, I'm proud to be a survivor. I'm proud to go public with my background, I'm proud of it all because if I can change one person, if I can give strength to one person, if I can validate one other person like myself, that wins prizes, is on television, has a big net worth, has a lot of friends, is loved. If I can show anybody that's in the throes of problems right now, that's feeling the bones crack, it's not always going to be like that. Yes, it can devastate you. Yes, you can end up in an asylum. Yes, you can lose your mind. Yes, you can go on anti-depressants. Yes, you can go on psych meds. Yes, you can numb your pain. But you can embrace your pain and you can ride your pain like a stallion to success. It's all in how you handle it. You can handle it many different ways. You can see a therapist, you can read so many books, there's so much online. I beg you people that are in the throes of the pain right now, up to your neck in the abuse, you're feeling like you can't live anymore. Just hang in there. Dig your heels in...I believe things will get better. You can help yourself and at this point that I'm at, you can help others. Men are known by their deeds. Alexander the Great said that. I have a big ego. I am not going to be around forever but the things that I've done, the people that I've influenced, the snotty-nosed hairdressers that I have taught through repetition and repetition and repetition, they finally they get it — that will live after. And what I find is with my mentors and I have fabulous mentors, you don't appreciate them at the time. Sometimes it takes ten or twenty years later and you say, "Oh, that's what they meant." I'm a selfish person. Everything I do brings joy to me. I am not altruistic. I do believe in God, I'll tell you that. In fact, that's one of the things that helps. It helps when you're enduring horrible pain at the hands of a loved one, it helps if you believe in God. I think the experience that I had in my life, has been a great one. I like to think that other people will have a similar experience. I know other people have. Getting back to the club, we've already paid our dues. A lot of the tools we used to survive the past, we no longer need those tools. We don't have to use a baseball bat to kill a mosquito, we don't have to jump three feet when someone touches us from behind, we don't have to eat everything on our plate because we don't know where the next meal is coming from, we don't have to knock our self out with booze until we don't know our own name and so we pass out and feel no

pain, we don't have to do that. Because we have strength from our experiences, the strength from our experiences can lead us to a future that lighter, that's brighter and this is part of life. And this is my life.

CT: That is beautiful. Thank you.

DF: I just want to read one of my press things. Can I read that?

CT: Okay.

DF: [Reading] *Dougie Freeman, educated in Boston, New York and North Africa, Dougie has recently been featured on the Tabatha Salon Takeover show on Bravo TV. He is currently under contract with NBC, with clients like Eartha Kitt, Jimmy James, Farrah Fawcett, Debbie Harry and Olympia Dukakis, this guy knows his way around the runway and the spotlight. Known for his ability to help the client use what they've got to get what they want, he has created signature style for many celebs, showbiz types and royalty. His warm and fun professional manner has made him a big hit with the LGBT community. Find him at the West End Salon in Provincetown or at Asa Hair Design in Cambridge.*

CT: I didn't know you were in North Africa?

DF: Yes, I was in Morocco for a little while. I watched barbers cutting hair in North Africa. That was part of my education.

CT: That's fantastic. I think it's 2:00 so we should go back to the salon [his hair model was scheduled to come at that time].

[Freeman signs the consent forms]

[END]